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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002975

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SADIQ RIKABI DISCUSSES SADRIST CEASEFIRE, PREDICTS  
TAWAFUQ'S RETURN

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and  
(d).

11. (C) Summary: On Sept. 4, Sadiq Rikabi, a senior advisor to PM Maliki urged us to "send a message" to mainstream Sadrists by announcing a willingness to fund reconstruction projects in Sadr City if the putative ceasefire ordered by Muqtada al-Sadr sticks. Rikabi also stressed the importance of curbing MNF-I raids on Sadr City so as not to give the extremists an excuse for violating the ceasefire. "This will not cost you very much," said Rikabi. As for the composition of PM Maliki's Cabinet, Rikabi said the PM was prepared to move forward with replacements to the Sadrists ministers who withdrew from the government earlier this year, but was still holding the door open for the return of the Tawafuq ministers. Rikabi predicted that shortly after the delivery of the mid-September Congressional report, Tawafuq would begin "inventing excuses" for a return to the government. End summary.

Responding to Sadr's Ceasefire  
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12. (C) After perfunctorily stating that PM Maliki had been pleased with the President's visit to Anbar Province the previous evening, Rikabi turned quickly to Muqtada al-Sadr's call for a six month suspension of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) activities. Rikabi confessed that he was not sure whether Sadr's call amounted to a ceasefire: "I'm not sure, but I hope it is . . . We should work on it to make sure that it becomes a real ceasefire."

13. (C) Running through talking points that we have heard from other GOI interlocutors, Rikabi argued for taking "two parallel approaches" towards the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS)/JAM. First, Coalition and Iraqi security forces should continue to hit JAM members found "using weapons or breaking the law." Second, the USG and the GOI should together "open a door" so as not to back moderate Sadrists into a corner. In concrete terms, this means slow-rolling arrests (which the GOI is doing in Karbala, so as not to make JAM "feel targeted" for starting last week's violence), but it also means suspending raids into Sadr City, said Rikabi, who stressed that it was important not to give the extremists an excuse for continuing to fight.

14. (C) Rikabi was unfazed by the evident contradiction between his starting point -- that we continue to hit JAM members breaking the ceasefire -- and his conclusion that the Coalition should suspend raids into Sadr City. Contrasting JAM members to Sunni insurgents, Rikabi said JAM fighters believe they deserve better treatment than the Sunnis because they are part of the political process and are not against the Iraqi government. Poloff questioned how this pro-GOI stance squared with the murders of the two southern governors as well as JAM attacks against ISF. Rikabi spread his hands

wide in a gesture of sincerity and replied: "I know that talking to the Sadrists is not easy. I know that it's tough to know whom to talk to, and to know who is truly influential. But we have to talk to them -- and this won't cost you very much." Rikabi suggested that the U.S. could help by holding out the promise of economic and reconstruction aid to Sadr City at a comparable level to that provided to Anbar Province, provided that the ceasefire holds.

#### Meeting on De-Baath Legislation September 5

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¶5. (C) On the status of de-Ba'athification legislation, Rikabi announced that DPM Barham Salih was convening a meeting of political deputies on September 5 in order to iron out the details left unfinished from the leaders' meeting. Rikabi professed astonishment that the draft law was being "re-opened" at VP Hashimi's request, when the leaders had already reached agreement on the text. "I warned Barham that if we opened the law to make some small changes for Hashimi, then everyone will want to make changes," said Rikabi. "I wonder whether Hashimi is just looking for more excuses to stall."

#### The Return of Tawafuq?

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¶6. (C) With respect to the composition of PM Maliki's cabinet, Rikabi confirmed that Maliki is prepared to move forward with replacements for the Sadrists ministers who resigned from the government earlier this year. But he said Maliki was determined to "hold the door open" for the return of the Tawafuq ministers. (Though Maliki verbally refused to

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accept the letters of resignation tendered by the Tawafuq ministers, he held on to the actual letters, thereby keeping his options open.) Rikabi predicted that by mid-September it would become clear that there would be no dramatic change in the USG's Iraq policy as a result of the Benchmarks Report. Once that happened, Tawafuq would begin making excuses (e.g., Maliki has met some of our demands) to justify its eventual return to a unity government,  
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